

Open Letter on the Council Tax Precept for 2019/20

One of my most important responsibilities as your Police and Crime Commissioner is setting the police budget for the year ahead. My priority is maintaining an effective force that keeps people safe whilst ensuring an efficient use of tax-payers' money.

It is paramount to continue to protect frontline police officer numbers, and that the Chief Constable has sufficient resources to tackle crime and prevent people becoming victims. Running Hertfordshire Constabulary costs just over £200m a year, with almost 60 per cent of this coming from Central Government funding, and the remainder being raised by the Policing Precept part of your Council Tax bill.

I have discretion to lower the Precept, keep it the same or increase it. This decision is made by balancing what you, the public, want your police service to look like against how much you want to pay for it. The budget must also take into account national operational policing demands put on the service and fulfilling the priorities of my [Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan 'Everybody's Business' 2019-2024](#).

Earlier this year I increased the precept by £2-a-month for the average (Band D) property, promising it would pay for an extra 75 frontline police officers. This successful recruitment drive is on schedule to be delivered. I am pleased that Hertfordshire residents are already seeing the benefits of increased officer numbers which went over 2,000 for the first time since 2011. In addition to this, Hertfordshire will also benefit from an additional 91 officers coming in the year ahead as the first part of central government's uplift of 20,000 police officers nationally.

Prudent financial management means that as a Hertfordshire resident, you pay the fourth lowest Council Tax Precept out of the 42 police forces in England and Wales. We have maintained this while also keeping crime levels amongst the lowest when compared to our most similar forces. Low crime rates and low tax are a major reason why Hertfordshire Constabulary is one of the most efficient and effective forces in the country. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (2019) 83.9 per cent of residents think Hertfordshire police are doing "a good or excellent job" and the recent formal inspection rated the force as "good" in all areas.

Due to the General Election there is a delay in the confirmation of the level of central government funding for 2020/2021, the uplift to the funding for new officers, and the flexibility to raise the precept until January 2020. Therefore at this stage I am not able to give you the usual full information on my proposed budget, but I am giving you as much as I can.

Should I be given the flexibility to raise the Council Tax Precept, I am minded to do so in such a way that provides certainty to the Constabulary and avoids cuts when we are working to expand the force. I expect I will be able to do this whilst remaining within the referendum limits set by the government.

It's a positive year, as we know that there is an increase in funding for additional officers, but that does also come with additional costs. Hertfordshire is getting a significantly larger police force and the costs of running it will go up proportionately. There are also the standstill pressures, including inflation and statutory pay rises that need to be budgeted for.

So my plan this year is to increase the precept to meet the pressures that are coming through rather

than to seek cuts, but I want to hear what you have to say. When we get the final figures from the Government I will give more detail on my proposals. In the meantime I want to hear your views and comments to help me determine whether this is the right strategy for Hertfordshire.

The consultation is now closed. A report on the outcome will be published with the budget in February 2020.